

Washington, DC -- Congressman Vern Buchanan (FL-13) is one of five Florida lawmakers who have filed legislation to compensate Florida tomato growers and packers for millions of dollars in losses associated with the recent salmonella scare. The bill, H.R. 6581 directs the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to make payments to members of the tomato industry who were unable to market their crops as a result of a Food and Drug Administration advisory in June linking tomatoes and salmonella. The FDA lifted its warning this month but not before the tomato industry suffered an estimated \$250 million in losses.

“Florida’s tomato growers meet the most stringent food safety requirements in the nation,” said Buchanan, who noted that Manatee County is the largest tomato producer in the state. “They have been devastated by the FDA’s premature advisory. They need to be compensated.”

Under the bill, the U. S. Department of Agriculture would be responsible for issuing regulations and determining eligibility for compensation.

The bill will also force the federal government to be more transparent when it comes to events like the salmonella scare.

Florida already has a tracking system in place. Tomatoes can be traced all the way up and down the state's farm-to-market distribution chain.

“We clearly need a better way to handle similar incidents in the future, added Buchanan. “The FDA needs to reform their trace-back programs so that growers and consumers do not have to go through the same nightmare during future outbreaks.”

Buchanan discussed the bill following a tour today of West Coast Tomato’s Palmetto Packinghouse. Manatee County produces approximately 40% of the tomatoes grown in Florida, which in turn produces over 70% of all fresh market tomatoes grown in the US.

The bill is also sponsored by U.S. Reps. Alan Boyd (FL-02), Tim Mahoney (FL-16), Debbie Wassermann-Shultz (FL-20), and Adam Putnam (FL-12).